

## My Testimony

The testimony of my salvation is more of a biography than anything else and there are three distinct times I can remember bowing my knee. I was raised in a Christian family that attended church three times a week, twice on Sunday and again on Wednesday night. Of course, we all know that one's salvation is not based on church attendance, family conditions, works, or anything other than the submission of our will and confessing that Jesus is the Christ, the risen Son of God who holds all authority in heaven and earth. In spite of growing up in church and attending every church youth camp available, I never had an adequate Bible education. Yes, I went to Sunday School and VBS in the summer, but what I learned I attributed to being stories that, while maybe being fact, they failed to be relevant in my world. When I was five years old my brother Timothy was born and when he was about six months old he had his first seizure. We spent a lot of time at various hospitals up and down the State searching for an answer as to why. My brother was anointed with oil and prayed for by the elders of our church but his healing never came, so I was a witness that neither God nor man had any ability or desire to heal and restore my brother from a physical deformity. He never developed higher than an 18 month old as far as his mental or physical abilities and carried the label of MR/DD until his death a few years ago. I am not trying to make excuses for my sin because of this, but looking back I can attribute some of my doubt to the previous experience.

I remember first accepting Christ during an altar call at Church camp sometime around the age of 12. To be honest, it was more of a purchase of fire insurance than a submission of will. I just knew that I didn't want to burn in hell and if coming forward and praying some magic words would prevent that, I was more than willing. Now, looking back at this, I can say that a transaction did take place, for I can see His hand of protection and guidance in some very key areas of my life. I just wasn't living for Him in all aspects of my life. I made my own goals, chose my own way, and lived with the consequences thereof. I went into the Army, got married to my best friend from High School, and watched her leave me for another while I was in the field. During this time I was very much wrapped up in myself and my selfish pursuits and ended up engaging in sexual debauchery for the first time. I never felt conviction, perhaps a little guilt at first that I attributed to the psychology of how I was raised. And even though I got over the guilt there was never any real satisfaction in my actions; it just felt good at the time.

When I got out of the Army, all the plans that I had fell apart. Getting back to California from Louisiana, I went through two vehicles, some possessions that I had to trade off to repair one vehicle, and all my immediate availability of funds. I had to move back in with my parents and start all over. I started going back to church to appease my parents and put the cloak of Christianity back on. I started participating in the function of the church along with a Bible study class. It was after all this that I bowed my knee to Him for the second time; I knew that all my efforts had failed and that if I was to ever to have any success, I was willing to let Him have the driver's seat. After this, I met the lady that became my second wife (she was the pastor's daughter). Now things appeared to improve greatly for a long time, but I still had never truly made Christ my Lord or learned to have that intimate relationship that is required to truly know Him. It

was mostly my wife's doing that kept me on the straight and narrow; without it I would have deviated long before I actually did. We were together for eleven years and I can honestly say that the first six were quite solid, especially compared with the last five. In those last five, I became increasingly bitter with my wife for I felt that she didn't treat me the way I deserved. This bitterness and dissatisfaction towards my wife motivated my emotional and physical departure from her. Returning to the sexual deviance I knew before, I looked to fill a void with someone who would love and desire me as much as I did them. I knew it was wrong, but did it anyway. This activity and mindset is what led to my criminal behavior and put me in jail.

Coming to jail was an extremely difficult spiritual situation for me, for I was familiar with Scripture and was aware of passages that warned of willful sin. Not wanting to go to prison either, I prayed earnestly for mercy and grace (not properly though) that I would not spend much time locked away. I got hold of my Bible from the outside and spent a lot of time searching for an answer to Hebrews 6 and 10. During this time God gave me a vision of my iniquity before His holiness and perfection. When I refer to my iniquity, I am not talking about the specifics of my crime, but to all of my sin from age 12 to the present. This was so vivid that the only physical response was an attempt to keep from regurgitation. For three nights in a row He placed this vision before me and I could not get to sleep until afterward. The message placed within me after this was "I have forgiven you for all this; is that not mercy enough? Trust Me." It was an overwhelming sensation and the completeness of His forgiveness truly hit home when I read through Jeremiah and saw the forgiveness and longsuffering God provided for Israel. I knew that it was the same for me. This is when I bent my knee and truly meant my repentance and willingness to declare Him my Lord. Before then, all I was willing for Him to be was Savior and benefactor, now I know Him as so much more. So in trusting Him, I accepted responsibility for my actions, admitted my guilt, and came to prison looking for how He would protect and provide. This was the beginning of my true journey with Him and I will never go back.

It was amazing to come to prison and see God at work and the men working for Him. There were ministry tables and a Chapel program called "School of Ministry." I started participating in both and the biblical education I was provided filled a desire that I had back in the mid '90's. Back then I could feel God's call to go to Bible college, but I told Him that I could not afford it. Now it was free. Praise the Lord for His providence and mercy, for I am once again ready to do Bible college work and trust Him to provide the means for it.